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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001083

SIPDIS

STATE PASS DOT FOR SAMPLE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ELTN](#) [ECON](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: A BUMPY RIDE: ON THE ROAD FROM ABUJA TO LAGOS

[1](#)1. Summary. Embassy officers drove on February 1 from Abuja to Lagos on a combination of good, bad, and dangerous roads. They averaged barely 45 m.p.h. despite two-lane highways' comprising nearly 35% of the distance traveled, and encountered or observed at least 42 checkpoints and roadblocks -- official or otherwise. The overall lack of two-lane highways created dangerous conditions for passing. Stretches of road surface were missing, extending down to bare dirt, and only one instance of road repairs was under way. Inefficiencies, poor conditions and shakedowns do not bode well for road transportation's role in developing southwestern Nigeria's economy, or for the safety of the region's motorists. End summary.

[1](#)2. Economic officer and consular officer traveled by road in a four-door sedan from Abuja to Lagos on February 1. This trip, which covered about 540 km (335 miles), took seven and one-half hours to the outskirts of Lagos from outer Abuja -- an average speed of barely 45 m.p.h., despite two-lane highways' comprising nearly 35% of the distance traveled.

[1](#)3. Officers departed from outer Abuja at 8:45 a.m. There were two lanes leading from Abuja only to the turnoff to the Abuja international airport, then a single lane in each direction until reaching Ilesa, in Osun State. There was one Motorized Police (Mopol) roadblock 5 km beyond the airport-road turnoff, and four more Mopol roadblocks on the way to Lokoja, about 200 km (125 miles) from Abuja, as well as a Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) stop and one indeterminate, quasi-government checkpoint. Mopol checkpoints, generally manned by two to six policemen, either were "rolling" or complete stops. One unspecified "customs" stop -- either state or federal -- was set up at the northern edge of Lokoja, and another checkpoint 2 km south of Lokoja was operated by an unidentified government agency. Wrecked cars were common. Traveling toward Lokoja, six crashed cars and two wrecked trucks littered the roadside in a 9.5 km (6 mile) stretch. Though some vehicle wrecks in Nigeria are left in place, these vehicle carcasses appeared to be relatively recent, with two completely gutted by fire.

[1](#)4. There were 14 Mopol checkpoints from Lokoja to Akpata, and 13 more, often with large logs blocking the road, from Akpata to Ilesa -- a combined distance of roughly 240 km (150 miles). At the edge of one town, two men dressed in civilian clothing operated their own checkpoint to stop trucks. They blocked the road with a large, flat board from which long nails protruded, and the men appeared to be "shaking down" commercial drivers.

[1](#)5. Some truck drivers at times traveled no faster than 30 k.p.h. (about 20 m.p.h.) because of the heavy congestion in towns, poor road conditions, and poor traffic control, with vehicles parked haphazardly at the roadside. In one place, a 40-foot by 20-foot stretch of road was missing, down to bare earth. Potholes reached down to the dirt. Multiple 120-foot stretches of the road surface were missing entirely in some places. The road quality sometimes improved for stretches and then deteriorated again, with portions of the road missing part of its top layer. A double-lane highway began at Ilesa and continued to Lagos, but was not always marked with painted lane lines.

[1](#)6. Potholes were common, including at 100 km (62 miles) west of Ibadan. There were FRSC stops north and west of Ibadan, and three other FRSC stops in the vicinity of Ibadan. Although the road quality improved southwest of Ilesa, with two lanes in each direction, serious accidents appeared increasingly common. There was one several-days-old body at the roadside 75 km east of Ibadan. Another officer observed east of Ibadan two bodies lying at the roadside, as well as the wreckage of two single-car crashes with their dead drivers still at the wheel, on the same route on February 1.

[1](#)7. Gasoline was sold consistently at the state-controlled price of 65 naira per liter (about USD .51 per liter). Gas stations were plentiful, but many appeared never to have opened for business. Anecdotal reports say many stations' owners instead sell their gasoline for high prices on the black market. Owners of gas stations also frequently tamper with their pumps so as to dispense less gasoline than the gas pumps indicate. The officers arrived in outer Lagos at 4:00 p.m. Despite the very poor roads on much of this

route, road repairs were being carried out at only one place along the way.

Comment

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18. This drive, on what is by default Nigeria's southwestern interstate highway connecting the country's capital and commercial center (Lagos), was hard on vehicles and drivers. With limited double-lane highways between Abuja and Lagos, passing was frustrating and dangerous. Much of the route passed through congested towns, rather than bypassing them. Road signs and directional markers were often lacking. There were almost no minimum or maximum speed limits posted along most of the route. Poor road conditions, inefficiencies and officials' opportunities for shakedowns do not bode well for road transportation's role in developing southwestern Nigeria's economy, or for the safety of the region's motorists.

CAMPBELL